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## FIRST RECORD OF GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL IN DOMINICA

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ON 9 MARCH 1999, while driving through Mahaut on the western coast of Dominica, we observed a large light-colored bird soaring several meters above the water 75 m from shore. Upon stopping and viewing the bird through 10x42 and 8x30 binoculars, we immediately recognized it as a gull. During the next 20 minutes (08:10-08:30), we were able to observe the bird from several vantage points, both flying and perched, at distances of 100-200 m away. Before consulting our regional field identification guide (Raffaele *et al.* 1998), Rimmer recorded detailed field notes, and we concluded that the bird was a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*), a species with which we were both familiar in North America. Subsequent review of Raffaele *et al.* (1998) and other field guides (Grant 1982, Harrison 1985) confirmed our initial identification. This sighting constitutes the first documented record of Great Black-backed Gull in Dominica.

Several features confirmed the bird's identity as a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull. Its large size was striking; we estimated that it was nearly twice as large as a Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) perched less than 2 m away for several minutes. Neither Herring (*L. argentatus*) nor Lesser Black-backed (*L. fuscus*) gulls would have similarly dwarfed this smaller gull species or Royal Terns (*Sterna maxima*) nearby. The bird had a mottled grayish-brown mantle and upper wing coverts, with whitish underparts, head, and rump. The tail showed a distinct but diffuse, broad blackish or dusky terminal band. The primaries and secondaries appeared dusky with a narrow, pale fringe and contrasted with the darker underwing

coverts. The whitish head had a slight dusky wash on the sides of the crown and nape, and there appeared to be a small dusky spot around and immediately behind the dark eye. The bill was heavy and entirely dark, and the legs appeared pale grayish from a distance. Whereas these plumage and soft part characters do not rule out Herring or Lesser Black-backed gulls, we are confident, based on the bird's massive size and our familiarity with the species in North America, that it was a Great Black-backed Gull.

Great Black-backed Gulls breed on both coasts of the North Atlantic Ocean and regularly winter south to central Florida and northern Africa (Good 1998). The species is considered rare in winter in Puerto Rico and a vagrant elsewhere in the West Indies, although its numbers appear to be increasing (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Only two documented records are known from the eastern Caribbean, on the islands of St. Barthélemy and Barbados (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). In Dominica, there is at least one previous unconfirmed report of a possible Great Black-backed Gull, but our sighting represents the first verified occurrence on the island (P. Evans, pers. Comm.; Evans and James 1997). With North American breeding populations of this species increasing and expanding southward (Good 1998), additional records of Great Black-backed Gulls seem likely in the Lesser Antilles.

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THE RUFIOUS-VENTED CHACHALACA (*ORTALIS RUFICAUDA*) IN THE WEST INDIES

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THE RUFIOUS-VENTED CHACHALACA (*Ortalis ruficauda*) is included in the avifauna of the West Indies (*sensu* Bond 1936) based upon its presence on Union Island and Bequia in the St. Vincent Grenadines (Ober *in* Lawrence 1878, Ogilvie-Grant 1893). On 23 May 1998, we observed and estimated the number of calling Rufous-vented Chachalacas on the island of Bequia. We found the species only on the northern three estates (Spring, Industry, and Park), where that island's vegetation seemed to be the richest. Vocalizations were primarily before 07:00 and seemed in every instance to be harmonic duets by paired individuals. From three primary census points plus two others, we believe we heard about 30 pairs. We estimate the population of chachalacas on northern Bequia to be *ca.* 150 pairs based on *ca.* 200 ha of suitable habitat on the northern end of the island, taken with the approximate distance over which we believe we could have heard them. Bequia's remaining 1300 ha is largely unsuitable, primarily because of human development and disturbance, but we were told by residents that chachalacas occasionally were encountered elsewhere on the island, so the population could be larger.

When observed, all chachalacas were in the canopy of leafy deciduous trees (species unknown), usually over 6 m. They were feeding on newly emerging shoots. By using tape playback, we coaxed one pair to perch on exposed bare limbs and one individual to land on a telephone wire, but concealment was the most typical behavior, even when calling. We never

saw any chachalaca on the ground, but we were informed that occasionally some would pick up poultry feed at a remote farmyard on the Park Estate.

On Union Island, which we visited 26 May 1998, we could not directly confirm the continuing presence of Rufous-vented Chachalacas, but every person with whom we spoke who lived along the bases of Mts. Parnassus and Taboi assured us that the species (known locally as the "Cocrico") could be found and was sometimes hunted on the northwestern end of the island, a largely uninhabited and wild area similar in size to that still holding the species on Bequia. Union Island is far more xeric than Bequia, however, so the density of chachalacas there might be different.

Ober (*in* Lawrence 1878) passed along a contemporary anecdote of its presumed, then-recent, introduction to Union, although his account of his trip (Ober 1880) suggests that he did not encounter it himself. That seems to be the only basis, other than supposition (e.g., Bond 1970, 1976), for its West Indian status ("introduced") as generally conveyed by the literature. Its presence on Bequia is poorly documented; it is attributed there on a list of specimens in the British Museum (Ogilvie-Grant 1893) where two were secured in 1890 by D. W. Smith, working for the Salvin-Godman Collection (R. Prÿs-Jones, *in litt.*). The American Museum of Natural History has four specimens labeled Bequia, three secured in 1901 by the Selwyn Branch collection, and one secured in